



Wrapper (2012) Jacqui Poncelet. Vitreous enamel, dimensions variable. Photo: Thierry Bal

All That Shimmers

Exploring the intertwined histories of metal and printmaking, **Dr Steve Brown** introduces artists currently experimenting with the possibilities they offer

Metal has a long history of, and important relationship with, printmaking technologies, due to its durability and the material's inherent transmutable qualities, which allow it to be cast as type or incised, as with printing plates, to form strong carriers of visual data. I aim to chronologically illustrate, through the following works and objects, how the emerging technologies of printmaking have had, and continue to have, a relationship with metals, from movable type through to 3D printing. This is a story that dispenses with categories, such as the fine and applied arts, and weaves from kitsch objects to artworks, from those made using incredible craft skills to the use of technological ingenuity, buildings to jewellery, lowly tin to noble gold.

The complex wearable object works by **Jonathan Boyd** (jonathanmathewboyd.wixsite.com) speak directly to both the past and the most current of technologies associated with the printed word. They look to have sprung out of Gutenberg's trays of cast, metal, movable type, yet they wind and reconfigure with such ingenuity only made possible through the use of computational processes. Boyd explores what the written syntax can be, when it is released from the paper page and allowed to propagate as three-dimensional form: knots tangle sentences, referencing their associations with knowledge, knowing and declare a kind of knot-knowing. The use of AI, co-authors and transforms Boyd's text so that it becomes a completely autonomous, asemic abstraction of letter forms. In addition, Boyd deploys a virtual reality

walkthrough, to escape gravitational orientation and to allow his handwriting to entangle in a virtual space. Once these coded actions find their digital form, Gutenberg's method of metal type casting is then brought into the 21st century through 3D printing out this coded matrix as a physical wax model. After casing it in a mould, the final transformation made by the pouring in of metal, brings this complex work back into the real world as solid, cast, metal type form.

Another artist-designer who bridges the past with contemporary processes is **Bine Roth** (peutporter.cargo.site). Her practice incorporates wearable artefacts within virtual worlds, but also looks to 19th century analogue engraving machines. It is popularly thought, that the origins of using engraved metal as

TECHNICAL

a matrix for printing onto paper came out of the ceremonial armourer's metal workshop, where artisans rubbed a pigment into incised decorated forms, such as helms and breast plates and pressed in paper to release the image to retain copies of their designs. Roth's undulating engraved metal cuffs and clothing panels speak directly back to these intricately decorated metal coverings and adornments, while offering those wearing them a portal into another world. *Dazzle – Reassembly of Bodies* was a mixed reality dance production, infused and confused by zig zag printed garments working alongside Roth's blaze of shimmering engraved metalwork. During a residency at the Deutsches Technikmuseum, Roth experimented with a Guilloché metal engraving machine, which allows the controlled reproduction of engraved line patterns. The etching produces a visual language, which relates to printed engraving, yet with the additional qualities of the metal substrate's shimmering surface highlights, which shine in ever-complex and mesmerising patterns.

Etching was also a printmaking technique that evolved out of the developments of metal artisan armourers. **Tord Boontje** (tordboontje.com) is a designer who has found an innovative use for the technique,

crossing between metalworking and printmaking disciplines. Boontje's aim is to combine image and form in metal

and his ingenious use of etching offers to both imprint a design onto the metal's surface and also to remove whole areas of material to form structure. As with Boyd's type-based work, Boontje frees his images from two dimensions, resulting in his *Garland*, a flat sheet of either stainless steel or brass imagery, which can then be installed by the owner, through twisting and entangling the etched-out organic forms and the etched-in floral surface imagery, bringing to life unique three-dimensional sculptural forms.

The screen stencil process dominated in the decorating industry over the latter half of the 20th century and continues today, largely due to the versatile potential of using many different pigment materials. **Jacqui Poncelet** (jacquelineponcelet.co.uk) is an artist who has explored pattern throughout her career. For her recent retrospective at MIMA, she produced the architectural piece *Wrapper*; screenprinted designs on buildings alongside Edgware Road station. These were printed by AJ Wells,



Untying This Mess (detail)
(2019) Jonathan Boyd.
Oxidised silver, silk,
55 x 50 x 65mm



Dazzle – Reassembly of Bodies event (2022) Bine Ross. Brass, dimensions variable. Photo: Oliver Wrobel

who, alongside working with artists, also produce all the London Underground enamel signage. The sign trade was where screen-stencil technology found its initial momentum and, coinciding with the advent of Ford's affordable motorcars, came the demand for standardised road signs, which could withstand all weathers. Vitreous enamel and metal signs offered this, and screenprinted pigments fused into the surface of signs, provided a printmaking solution to show clear, bold, durable prints outside. As with Poncellet's architectural print *Wrapper*, metal materials will allow these prints to last and be seen in the built environment for generations to come.

The relationship between metals and printmaking runs deep in our cultural perception of the forms and materiality of image-making, and these examples illustrate this continuity of parallel innovations throughout the history of technical developments. Metal's potential



Garland (2002) Tord Boontje. Etched stainless steel, hanging (approx.): 250 x 300mm

for lustre has seen these objects collected and treasured and the durability of these works, means that they have the potential

to survive and tell future cultures of our creativity and of our explorations into what a printed image can be.

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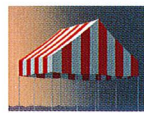
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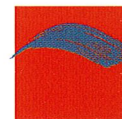
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